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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 000021

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TAGS: PREL PGOV UNSC PBTS MO WI AG

SUBJECT: SAHRAWI AMBASSADOR: POLISARIO ENERGIZED BY
SUCCESSFUL TIFARITI CONGRESS

REF: 07 ALGIERS 1055

Classified By: Ambassador Robert S. Ford; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: According to the Polisario Ambassador to Algeria, the December 14-20 party congress in Tifariti has provided the Polisario with an injection of energy and confidence moving into the January 8-9 Manhasset negotiations. While the pledge to resume armed struggle against Morocco "has always been on the table," according to the Sahrawis, we made our opposition to this approach clear to our contacts at the Sahrawi Embassy as well as to the highest levels of the Algerian security services. In both cases, we were reassured that there are no immediate plans to resume hostilities. The Sahrawis blame "clumsy and unbalanced" maneuvering by the international community for an increase in Polisario talk of war at Tifariti. The success of the congress and their newly aggressive stance, they hope, will serve to shape previously "unbalanced" bilateral negotiations by making the Moroccans "nervous." Our contacts also expressed concern that the UN, weakened by the December 11 attack on its facility in Algiers, has been forced to stall much-needed World Food Program support for Polisario refugee camps. Finally, the Sahrawi Ambassador passed us a personal letter to President Bush, from the Chairman of the Tifariti congress. The complete text of the letter is provided in paragraph 9, and we will forward the original to the Department. END SUMMARY.

A SUCCESSFUL CONGRESS

¶2. (C) Polisario Ambassador to Algeria Mohammed Beissat told Pol/Econ Chief on January 6 that he had never in his life seen a party congress as large and successful as the December 14-20 Tifariti edition, the twelfth Polisario congress. According to Beissat, 1750 delegates attended, and 20 percent of the Polisario leadership was replaced. Beissat, who is moving to Tindouf in mid-January to assume his new duties as Polisario Minister-Delegate for African Affairs, will be replaced by Abdallah Ghali in Algiers. Beissat said the congress was observed by 250 international representatives of 40 different nationalities. He added that the ideological and policy debate at the congress was the deepest and most energetic he had ever seen.

TO FIGHT OR NOT TO FIGHT?

¶3. (C) Pol/Econ Chief cautioned Beissat about returning to arms against Morocco, warning that it was a bad idea that the international community would not support. Beissat replied that the Tifariti call for renewed armed struggle has "always been on the table," and the Polisario was prepared to fight for self-determination. He was quick to explain, however, that the Polisario had no immediate plans to attack Morocco and still preferred direct negotiations, hoping that the steadfast stance adopted at Tifariti would force the Moroccans to be more flexible and negotiate all proposals "rather than just their own." We reminded Beissat that the U.S. views the Moroccan proposal as a legitimate basis for discussion, to which Beissat responded by asking several questions about "when a U.S. administration's policy shuts down" in the final year of any given presidency. He made it clear that he believed there might be some benefit in waiting for a new U.S. administration to take office.

¶4. (C) Separately, Ambassador told Algerian external intelligence service director Lallali on January 6 that the U.S. hoped the Polisario would not risk returning to hostilities in the Western Sahara. Referring to A/S WelchQ's January 4 conversation with Algerian Foreign Minister Medelci, the Ambassador told Lallali that we hoped the direct conversations about the Moroccan autonomy plan in New York would allow for some tangible progress in shaping a political solution. Lallali brushed the remarks aside. He acknowledged the rhetoric coming out of the Tifariti conference was sometimes hot but said it was not a serious threat. One could expect no less from a leadership and people who felt their backs were against a wall, he claimed.

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When Ambassador pressed the point about no return to hostilities, Lallali reassured that there would be none.

MOROCCO "ISOLATED LIKE CUBA"

¶5. (C) The biggest success of the congress, Polisario Ambassador Beissat said, came in the reaction it provoked within the Moroccan government. According to Beissat, the Moroccans demarched "every MFA in the world" following the congress in an attempt to make sure that the rhetoric of the congress did not weaken its position in advance of the next round of Manhasset negotiations. A confident Beissat claimed this showed "weakness and desperation." Because an unprecedented 12 members of the new Polisario government come from the Moroccan side of the berm, Beissat said the Moroccans were nervous because "this was happening right under their noses and there is nothing they can do to stop it." Beissat claimed that Morocco was worried because it was now isolated "like Cuba" - its EU aspirations cut off at the North, and surrounded by regional neighbors whose principles are sympathetic to Polisario demands for self-determination.

PUSHING FOR GREATER RESPECT

¶6. (C) Beissat was grateful that the U.S. had advised Morocco to talk directly to the Polisario, and said that the Polisario was committed to direct negotiations as long as they were "balanced" and free from "double-standards." He repeated several times that he admired U.S. principles of democracy and self-determination, and hoped that ultimately, the U.S. would go further and push Morocco to accept UN resolutions 1754 and 1783. "Morocco should not feel overconfident," Beissat urged, as this would not help induce the peace and stability the U.S. desired in the region. Beissat suggested that if the U.S. was truly committed to fair and direct bilateral negotiations, it should invite both delegations to the White House or State Department immediately following the conclusion of the January 8-9 talks. He also insisted that the Polisario at least be

invited into the State Department or met by an Ambassador, and urged that more U.S. delegations be sent to Tindouf. (Note: Beissat was referring to delegations from the Executive Branch, not CODELs or NODELs, of which he said they receive "a steady flow." End note.)

¶7. (C) Algerian external intelligence director Lallali, meanwhile, extolled to the Ambassador on January 6 the virtues of the Baker Plan and urged the U.S. to deliver Moroccan acceptance of that plan. The Ambassador said the plan was now dead. The U.S. had supported it but the Moroccans had clearly rejected it. Ambassador told Lallali the autonomy plan presented by Morocco, by contrast, is on the table and merits discussion, especially since the Saharawi refugees have long suffered and the Sahrawis inside the Moroccan zone claim they are suffering as well. Lallali thanked the U.S. State Department for sending a team to Layoune recently, calling that a positive step. However, he underlined that the Polisario request for a referendum that allowed the choice of independence "even if the Sahrawis don't take independence" was reasonable. The U.S., he urged, should support this as the only realistic and fair choice.

COMMENT: EMBOLDENED AND ENERGIZED

¶8. (C) Beissat, recently promoted into the highest ranks of the Polisario "cabinet," was clearly energized and optimistic after the Tifariti conference, believing it will give the Polisario a stronger negotiating position in the Manhasset talks. Beissat repeated the same old arguments we reported in reftel about what the Polisario sees as the U.S. "double standard" and rhetoric that "sabotages the negotiation process." What is different now is that, in Beissat's view, there is a certain inevitability to self-determination for the Sahrawis, since he believes Morocco is unable to maintain control over the Western Sahara even with U.S. support. The remaining question for Morocco, the U.S. and Europe, in

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Beissat's view, is how difficult they choose to make the process. Meanwhile, the Sahrawis appear prepared to run out the clock on the U.S., hoping that a new U.S. administration will bring a new U.S. approach to the negotiations. We see no hint of flexibility from the Polisario here, nor from the Algerian military establishment, and MFA Minister Delegate for Maghreb Affairs Missahel was just as blunt as Lallali with the Ambassador in mid-December. END COMMENT.

¶9. (U) BEGIN TEXT OF LETTER TO PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH:

Letter to Mr. George W. Bush
President of the United States of America
The White House

Tifariti, 20 December 2007

Mr. President,

It gives me great pleasure to address to you this letter as chairman of the 12th Congress of the Polisario, held in Tifariti from 14 to 20 December 2007, and to extend to you and the American people our most sincere wishes for a happy and prosperous New Year 2008.

Mr. President,

The Congress studied deeply the UN Peace Process in Western Sahara as well as other important issues relating to the participation of women in all decision-making structures and the role of Sahrawi civil society in promoting democracy and respect for human and fundamental liberties. In this context, the Congress also reviewed thoroughly the latest Security Council resolutions 1754 and 1783 by which the Council urged the two parties to the conflict, Frente

Polisario and the Kingdom of Morocco, to enter into serious negotiations without preconditions, which would lead to the exercise by the Sahrawi people of their right to self-determination in a free, just and democratic manner.

The Congress applauded the role of the United States, under your Presidency, to promote and defend human rights and preserve international peace and security. The Congress, however, noted with regret the recent stand of your administration, which would not lead to a speedy, just and lasting solution to the conflict Western Sahara (sic) that can only be resolved in accordance with the UN doctrine relating to decolonisation.

Mr. President,

The 12th Congress of the Frente Polisario strongly urges your administration to use its privileged relations with the Kingdom of Morocco to encourage it to abide by the UN resolutions relevant to the question of Western Sahara in particular those calling for the holding of a free and fair referendum by which the Saharawi people could decide their own future. Furthermore, the Congress calls upon you to ensure that Morocco immediately puts an end to its violations of human rights in the occupied areas of Western Sahara.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurances of my highest considerations.

Hamma Salama
The Chairman of the Congress

END TEXT OF LETTER TO PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH.
FORD